Examining the Future of Southeast Asian Studies in Asia

By Dr Charlotte Setijadi

A team of scholars from HSS represented NTU at “Southeast Asian Studies in Asia from Multidisciplinary Perspectives” — an international conference on the future of Southeast Asian Studies in Asia held in Kunming, China on 6 - 8 March 2014.

The latest in a series of conferences organised under the auspices of the “Plural Coexistence and Sustainability in Asia” research collaboration between NTU and Kyoto University, the conference was co-hosted by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Dehong Prefectural Association of Social Sciences.

While the last two conferences in the series were held at NTU in March 2013 and at Kyoto University’s Centre for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) in December 2011, Yunnan Academy of Social Science was chosen as NTU’s strategic partner in the organisation of the 2014 conference due to its a long tradition of Southeast Asia research and its location in Yunnan as China’s gateway to Southeast Asia.

Led by Asian studies specialist and Chair of HSS Prof Liu Hong, the HSS team included environmental economist Asst Prof Chang Young Ho, environmental sociologist Asst Prof Md Saidul Islam, Asian historians Prof Gregor Benton and Asst Prof Els Van Dongen, and HSS postdoctoral fellow Dr Charlotte Setijadi, an anthropologist working on Indonesia.
True to its purpose of being a multidisciplinary conference, participants came from fields as wide-ranging as economics, politics, history, Asian studies, anthropology, geography, agriculture and forestry. Participants presented exciting new research on topics such as the rise of China and its implications in Southeast Asia, ethnic minority studies, regional security, food sustainability, environmental protection, and diasporic transnationalism. The presentations generated lively discussions that could potentially lead to research collaborations between scholars of Southeast Asia who are based in Asian institutions.

The conference also included a fieldtrip to the county-level cities in the Dehong Dai and Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan province, where conference participants got to see the ethnic diversity of the Dai and Jing Po people and interact extensively with local scholars and government officials. Conference participants also travelled to the China-Myanmar border crossing in the thriving border town of Ruili to witness first-hand the economic and cultural exchanges between China and Myanmar that have fuelled the impressive infrastructure building around the Sino-Myanmar border.

NTU is committed to supporting the advancement of Southeast Asian Studies in Asia from an interdisciplinary perspective with HSS signing a charter to establish an international Consortium for Southeast Asian Studies in Asia (SEASIA) in October 2013. The first biennial SEASIA conference will be held at Kyoto University in December 2015. HSS is in the process of planning a number of panels, including mobilities and connectivities, governance, science and society, and intra-Asian dynamics.